Big week ahead for South African citrus

By Fred Meintjes | 10 March 2025

Several developments in South Africa this week will be crucial for the country's citrus industry

An important meeting of citrus growers in South Africa, a delayed budget speech by the national minister of finance, and the court case between International Container Terminal Services (ICTSI) and shipping giant Maersk are all key events this week that affect the citrus business.

The grower meeting takes place with several major challenges on the horizon this year, and will also determine the crop forecast for 2025.

After a 2024 season in which exports fell short of predictions, the industry is expected to announce a further increase in production along its path of growth towards 250mn cartons within ten years.

Last year's reduced export shipments was not due to a smaller citrus crop, but rather competition from the juicing sector, which saw a spike in prices and resulted in higher volumes diverted to the sector.

Experts agree that shortages on fruit for the juice sectors are likely to continue this year, but they also feel that organic growth in the South African fresh orange sector will be sufficient for the industry to resume export increases in the fresh citrus sector.

The export season started in week two when the first early lemons were harvested and volumes in the other categories will gradually pick up from this month.

While crop forecasting and planning for the season are important, a major focus will be on the delayed budget speech on Wednesday in Cape Town.

The presentation of the budget was delayed last month because the members of the Government of National Unity could not reach consensus on tax increases.

The citrus sector has made it clear that the minister should deal with funding and strategies for the transport agency, Transnet, which controls the rail and harbours, including container terminals.

It would have liked to have these matters resolved before this week and has continually insisted on privatisation of the ports and rail systems.

Observers say that resolving the Transnet problems is, outside tax increases, the most important issue for the South African government.

That is why the case in the high courts in Durban, to be heard on Wednesday, is being watched with equal interest by the citrus industry.

The case was brought by Maersk against ICTSI and Transnet after ICTSI was awarded the joint venture partnership in Durban's Container terminal.

The case has been dragging on for almost a year and is also seen as delaying the resolution of the problems citrus growers experience in the port.